

Regan exchanges hisses with Nancy via 'Today' show

By David Braaten
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Donald Regan took his turn at "My Turn" yesterday.

Appearing on NBC's "Today" show to comment on Nancy Reagan's new book, the former White House chief of staff characterized his ex-boss's wife as a self-pitying, meddlesome, Scrooge-like ingrate who didn't have a clue to what was going on during her husband's eight years as president.

And that was just good-natured TV banter. Mr. Regan is still polishing his pejoratives for a full-dress book review in the December issue of Washingtonian, a magazine spokeswoman said yesterday.

Among the questions lobbed up to Mr. Regan by "Today" hostess Deborah Norville was one about the late CIA Director William Casey, who was found to have a fatal brain tumor shortly after the Iran-Contra scandal broke in late 1986.

"She particularly criticizes you for wanting to delay asking for his resignation ... until after Christmas," Ms. Norville said.

Mr. Regan knocked it into the parking lot. "That's correct," he said. "Here is a fellow who had served Ronald Reagan long and well. He was the one who had run Ronald Reagan's campaign in 1980, that got him elected in the first place. He had served him very well as head of the CIA. Now the man was dying ...

"Yet she was insisting that I get rid of the guy the week before Christmas. I just didn't have the heart to do that, and I absolutely refused to do it."

Mr. Regan, who was fired by President Reagan at the first lady's insistence, contrasted the Regans — to her distinct disadvantage. Noting that in his own book and in speeches to this day he praises Mr. Reagan "for the great things he accomplished," Mr. Regan added:

"But she just doesn't seem to realize what's been going on during those eight years. She shows no gratitude to anyone. In yesterday's Los Angeles Times, they had a full spread on this book, and in it they show 20 people, all of whom Nancy Reagan criticizes."

When Ms. Norville suggested that there is "no love lost" between Mr. Regan and the former first lady, he said: "Oh, I wouldn't say love lost, but I would say this: I think that she takes too much pity on herself."

He even implicitly puts her down vis-a-vis Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's wife, Raisa, whom Mrs.

Reagan faults in her book for talking too much. "Well, I thought Mrs. Gorbachev is a very intelligent woman," Mr. Regan said. "She did have a lot to say, but then I think she felt she did have something to say."

Furthermore, he said, "all this bashing of the president of the Soviet Union's wife isn't going to help Soviet-American relationships, and yet that's exactly what we're trying to do, and it's something that Nancy Reagan said she wanted her husband to do. Yet she undoes it by much of this bashing of his wife."

Mrs. Reagan's book, coauthored with William Novak, is due in bookstores Friday. While most of the hottest gossip has been disclosed in pre-publication excerpts and interviews with the former first lady, there is still some juicy stuff left for Reagan fans to chew on.

For example, Mrs. Reagan reveals that she and Ronnie, as she calls him, had a difficult first year after their marriage on March 4, 1952.

"During that year we had our first child, Patti, who was born — go ahead and count — a bit precipitously but very joyfully, on October 22, 1952."

In an interview published in Sunday's Los Angeles Times, Mrs. Reagan was pressed on the possibility of premarital sexual intimacy, and she replied:

"Uh, if you're asking if I ever lived with Ronnie, no, I did not. Um, but you're also talking about a man in his 40s and a woman — what? — in her late 20s. We're not talking about teen-agers. And we knew we were going to get married." Mrs. Reagan's "official" date of birth is July 6, 1923, but her high school and college records put it two years earlier.

The Washington Post _____
The New York Times _____
The Washington Times A-3
The Wall Street Journal _____
The Christian Science Monitor _____
New York Daily News _____
USA Today _____
The Chicago Tribune _____

Date 24 Oct '89

Known for her fiercely protective attitude toward Mr. Reagan, she does offer a mild criticism of him — or his speech writers — in the book. Though her husband was never a "warmonger," she writes, "his calling the Soviet Union an evil empire was not particularly helpful in establishing a dialogue with the other side."

She also discloses that in 1983, missing her friends in California and concerned for the president's safety, Mrs. Reagan tried unsuccessfully to persuade her husband not to run for re-election. "Had it been up to me," she writes, "Ronald Reagan might well have been a one-term president."

• This article is based in part on wire service reports.

Page 25